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NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUMMILITARY ASSUMES LARGER POLITICAL ROLE IN SURINAME

Noncommissioned officers who staged a violent takeover in Suriname on 25 February are taking a far more active political role than anticipated by President Ferrier, who worked hard to restore a semblance of democratic rule in the weeks following the coup. Recent acts and statements by members of the nine-man National Military Council--the de facto ruling body--reflect a tough attitude, growing impatience with parliamentary restraints, and a strong inclination to exercise unconditional power. Leftists, who have a toehold in the new government, are encouraging the unseasoned young sergeants to adopt a more radical line. The military council members, in turn, are becoming more aggressive in demanding reforms.

Leftist Encroachments

Although information regarding the government's intentions remains fragmentary, there are disturbing signals. In an imprecise promulgation of the government's program on May Day, the Prime Minister declared that elections would be postponed a year beyond the legally mandated requirement of October 1981. This decision follows growing evidence that radical military leaders are privately inclined to postpone elections indefinitely. Prime Minister Chin A Sen's public allusion to the need for regulation of the press and the intent to ignore constitutional

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provisions that stand in the way of proposed reforms cast doubt on a return to democratic norms. This is reinforced by private references to the constitution as "irrelevant" by key army spokesmen.

The role of parliament in the interim government is still largely undefined. Although a compromise appears to have been reached allowing parliament to remain--while transferring some of its powers to the Prime Minister--

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legislation had been drafted by government advisers permitting rule by decree. A key adviser to the Prime Minister--a Trotskyite with extremist ideas--is still believed to favor eliminating the legislature altogether.

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Other proposals--possibly instigated by radicals counseling the military--include the establishment of a People's Militia and the formation of People's Committees. The latter measure, presumably intended to promote mass mobilization, suggests a network of locally organized informants patterned after the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. Ten such community groups have already been formed and 35 more are planned. The source of these ideas evidently is People's Party leader Dr. Lie Pauw Sam, a pro-Cuban confidant of several military council members who appears to be pushing for more radical programs.

A strident socialist-style rhetoric is being voiced with greater frequency by the NCO group. A key military council spokesman, Sgt. Sital, who is sympathetic to the People's Party, has been outspoken in defending the "revolution" and the "second republic." His demagogic public statements also appear to undercut President Ferrier's earlier pledges to retain constitutional structures. Reflecting a growing mood of pessimism, Ferrier has expressed anxiety over the military's efforts to relegate him to the sidelines--and implicitly indicated that there is little prospect of reversing present trends.

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A conspicuous example of the recent inroads by leftists is the apparent influence wielded by Andre Haakmat, a close adviser to the Prime Minister and an avowed extremist

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Haakmat prevailed on the Prime Minister to sack the respected foreign office director who had been a strong

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friend of the United States. Haakmat claims to have written a book that provided the guidelines for the recent insurrection. He can be expected to play on the army leaders' insecurity and inexperience to push his Marxist ideas.

An Aggressive Bid For Popular Support

To demonstrate their revolutionary credentials, the sergeants controlling the government are conducting a freewheeling investigation into corruption--a move that has met with wide popular endorsement. The campaign has been characterized by a lack of respect for due process and incommunicado detentions of possibly several dozen persons.

Despite a long tradition of judicial integrity and compliance with civil law, little resistance is expected against the army's arbitrary actions. Legal authorities reportedly have been intimidated and do not intend to protest strongly. Among the persons reportedly detained for questioning is former Prime Minister Arron, who has been arrested for the second time since the coup.

In other areas, the government is bidding for wider support through emphasis on social justice and improved living conditions. The broad program of reforms--pensions are to be doubled, health care expanded, the voting age lowered, and women's rights widened--has struck a responsive chord among many citizens. This will probably offset the loss of goodwill among business and elite groups.

The Cuban Connection

The US Embassy in Paramaribo has learned from a reliable source that the Cubans have again approached the government with offers of military and economic aid--including tractors and fishing vessels. To get a foot in the door, the Cubans might also promise assistance in the fields of medical, educational, or construction work. Token military aid would likely include training, small arms and antiaircraft weapons, or possibly helicopters--all of which would represent a small investment for the probable political return.

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Agents from Havana extended offers of aid shortly after the coup but were rebuffed. The second Cuban bid was also rejected, but the Prime Minister asserts that there is sharp division within civilian and military circles over the advisability of accepting Havana's overtures. Clearly the government has tried to use the Cuban ploy to extract aid from the United States. The US Ambassador has been given an extensive shopping list for military equipment and training that far exceeds the country's needs and means. Defense Minister Van Rey has suggested that the government did not expect the Netherlands to provide the sort of aid it wanted. Other Western governments have received feelers for assistance, and it appears that military leaders are prepared to exhaust these options first. Frustrations growing out of unrealistic expectations, however, might prompt them to reconsider Cuba's offers. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a cultural agreement with Cuba is already in the works.

The Prime Minister has criticized Suriname's historical reliance on the Dutch, and military council spokesmen have said they will concentrate greater efforts on working with nations of the Caribbean--perhaps pointing to greater willingness to do business with Cuba.

Despite the significant number of moderates in the army and the cabinet, their ability to contain radical designs appears to be crumbling. Leftist leaning elements will continue to use every opportunity to manipulate unsophisticated members of the government for their own purposes. Havana can be expected to maintain pressure for establishment of an embassy and to explore ways of increasing ties to influential government, labor, cultural, and social groups in Suriname.

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**SUBJECT: Military Assumes Larger Political Role in Suriname**

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